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TO A
FRIEND, &c.

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LETTER TO A FRIEND;

Wherein is endeavour'd

A RECONCILIATION between
the contending PARTIES in
relation to the Doctrine of the
Ever-blessed TRINITY.

By N. S.



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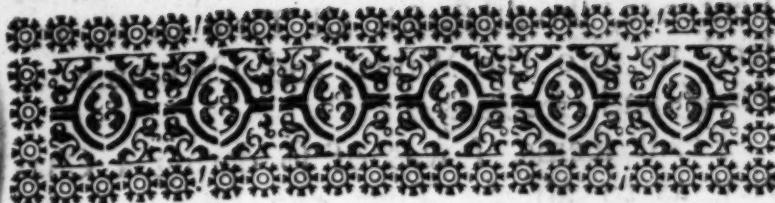
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A

LETTER
TO A
FRIEND, &c.

SIR,



HIS is to return you thanks for the Opportunity you give me to enlarge upon that Discourse, which had like to have frightened some of my best Friends out of their good Opinion of my CHRISTIANITY. Surely this SAME THING, call'd

call'd ORTHODOXY, has something in it of a very nice and delicate *Nature*, that an innocent Thought, a harmless Word or Sentence, should forfeit all Title to it, and send us into the Wilds and Commons of *Heresy* and *Heathenism*.

Yes it seems, I was of so daring a Charity as to assert, That the *Difference between the Trinitarians and the Arians was not so material, as to necessitate a Separation.* And yet, my Friend, after all that I find in your Letter, you must excuse me if I am still of the same Mind.

Indeed, as you have stated the Case, the two CONTENDING PARTIES seem to stand at an irreconcilable Distance ; but give me leave to think it possible for another Representation to be given, that, at least, would be equally fair and impartial. The following Things which I have to offer to your Consideration, will, I hope, convince you, that as I had some REASON for what I said, so the CHARITY of it is not altogether so formidable as at first it was apprehended.

I. I desire in the first place, that it may be observ'd, that the *Terms, Modes, or Forms of Expression*, so much CONTESTED, are not to be found in the *Holy Scripture*, nor so much as pretended to be found there.

there. Where is it said, that there are *three Persons* in GOD? or that *Jesus Christ was begotten from all Eternity*? And where have we so much as one Syllable concerning *Hypostatick Union*? Is it not then a little severe that we should bar our Christian Brethren **RELIGIOUS** Fellowship and Communion with us, because they happen to be so weak, as to scruple those *Terms or Modes of Expression* which are of human *Invention*? If they had been so absolutely necessary, it is strange that they are not to be found in that RULE which infinite Wisdom hath prescrib'd us.

But say you, altho' these things are not in so many express words to be found in *Scripture*, yet are they by just and necessary *Consequence* deducible from thence. To which I answer, that however just and necessary these *Consequences* may appear to you and me, yet is it very unreasonable for us to expect that every one else should have the same Opinion of them.

Besides, why should we not allow the *Arians*, or *Unitarians*, the same Liberty we take our selves, I mean of judging concerning the *Necessity, Reasonableness, or Expediency of Consequences* drawn from *Holy Scripture*? There are Christians of several *Denominations*, and each *Denomination* have their peculiar *Forms or Modes of Expression*, and each very con-

confident that these *Forms* or *Modes* are just and reasonable *Consequences* from *Holy Scripture*: Now which of them all but would think it very hard to be ty'd down to the *Forms* and *Modes* of a different *Denomination*?

Indeed some have ventur'd to tell the World, that *Consequences* justly drawn from *Holy Scripture* are of equal *Authority* with *Holy Scripture* it self. This, I must confess, would be something to the purpose, could it be made out; but before that can be done, it must first be proved, that such who draw these *Consequences* are divinely *Inspired* and *Commissioned*: for let these *Consequences* be ever so true or certain, yet would this no more entitle them to an equal *Authority*, than it would *Euclid's Elements*. Farther, it would be no unreasonable *Enquiry*, whether upon supposition of a certain number of these *Consequences* being drawn from *Holy Scripture*, all other *Consequences*, justly drawn from these, be of equal *Authority* too, and so on *ad infinitum*.

It is a determin'd adjudg'd Case among all that profess the Christian Name, and it has been well attested by Miracles, That the *Holy Scriptures* are of divine *Authority*; but can the same thing be said of *Consequences* drawn from thence by weak fallible Men?

All

All that is or can be urg'd for the Proof of the divine *Authority of Consequences*, is, that they are just and true; but then who shall be *Judge*, or what COMMON RULE is there to which every Christian is bound to repair, and oblig'd to stand? If there be nothing of all this, of what Use can their divine *Authority* be, unless for the IMPROVEMENT of Tyranny and Enthusiasm? Which I leave to the Controversy of this *Position* to consider of.

II. Again, it is worth observing, That the *Trinitarians* do profess, that when they apply these *Terms*, *Forms*, or *Modes of Expression* to the *Deity*, it is not in their common or mere usual *Acceptation*. And the Truth is, I could never yet understand that the *Arians* or *Unitarians* have deny'd these *Terms* as applicable to the *Deity* in any other sense. Herein hath chiefly consisted the Force and Success of their way of writing.

III. Give me leave, Sir, further to observe, that however warm and zealous most of us have been for expressing our selves after this manner, yet have we all along professed that it is a *Mystery*, and such an one as is out of the reach of human *Conception* or *Explication*. We, as it were,

with one consent, acknowledge that we have no *Notion, Conception, or Idea* of that which these *Terms, Modes, or Forms of Expression* stand for.

The *Trinitarians* do one and all agree in this, that there are *Three*; but what *Three* these are, hath still been the *Question*, and is like to be so to the World's end. If we consult the Writings of several of the most Learned of the *Trinitarians*, we shall find that they have been not a little uncertain, what *Forms or Modes of Expression* are most proper to set forth this *High Mystery*. Some that did not care to descend to particulars, have contented themselves with saying, that there be *Three Somewhats*; others, *Three Modes or Attributes*; others, *Three Subsistences*; some few, *Three eternal Minds or Spirits*; but that which has most generally obtain'd, is, *Three Persons*: and yet this last has not given entire Satisfaction to some of the most strenuous Asserters of the *Doctrine of the Trinity*. Nor is it so great a Wonder that there should be so much Uncertainty, and that we are so much at a Loss to express that in words, of which we have no *Conception or Idea*.

I say then, if this be the Case, as I verily think it is; I mean, if the *Trinitarians* do profess that they have no *Notion, Conception, or Idea* of that which these *Terms* do stand for,

for, where is the Difference between them and the *Arians* or *Unitarians*? Can any more be made of it than this, that the one side applies these *Forms of Expression* to the Deity, professing at the same time that the whole of it is a *Mystery*, and that they have no *Notions* or *Ideas* of what these *Terms* do stand for; and the other side rejects these *Terms* as improper and unapplicable to the Deity, in their common Use and Signification? Now if it be so, is it possible that any Difference in Judgment or Opinion should arise from hence?

What enlargement, what addition can it be to the *Faith* of him that admits of these *Terms*? What is it that he believes more than another? or what Deficiency is there in the *Faith* of him that rejects them? What is it that he believes less than the other? Would not one be tempted to think, that the whole Controversy depends upon the **USING** or not **USING** these *Forms*, or *Modes* of expressing themselves concerning the *Deity*; And that there is no such thing as any real Difference in Doctrine or Opinion?

IV. In the next place it deserves to be consider'd, that there are many *Points* of valuable Importance wherein both Parties

are professedly and avowedly agreed ; as for Instance :

1. That there is but *One GOD* in the highest and most exalted Sense of the Word — That this *One GOD* is but one individual indivisible *Essence, Being, or Substance* — That He is infinitely Perfect — That all other *Beings* with their several Powers, Perfections, Attributes, &c. are derived from this One All-Perfect — That this Alone is the supreme Object of all that *Love, Fear, Service, and Adoration* which any of the Creatures are capable of rendring unto *Him.*

2. Each side will agree, That **JESUS CHRIST** is the *only-begotten Son of GOD*, the *Christ of GOD*, the *Messiah*, *Jesus the Saviour*, the *Redeemer*, the *only Mediator*, that *Prophet, Priest, and King* foretold in the antient Prophecies, and prov'd to be so by unquestionable Miracles — That the *Father* was in *Him*, and that *He* was in the *Father*, that *in Him dwelt the Fulness of the Godhead* — That *He* derived an immediate *Commission* and *Authority*, with full and ample Powers from the *Father* ; and that *God the Father* so acted by *Him*, in *Him*, and with *Him*, that what *He* did, and what *He* spake for our Instruction and Salvation, is to be esteem'd as Done and Spoken by the most *High GOD himself* — That *He suffered*

fered and died upon the Cross, Offering Himself up to GOD his Father, a spotless and acceptable Sacrifice for our Sins — That on the third day He arose from the dead, after that He ascended into Heaven, and sits at the right hand of GOD, making continual Intercession for us — That GOD by this his Son Jesus will judge the World in Righteousness at the last Day.

3. Again, both sides will agree, That all those Virtues, Powers, Operations, &c. which in Holy Scripture are ascribed to the *Holy Ghost*, are no other than the Virtues, Powers, and Operations of the most High GOD himself.

4. In the last place, both sides are agreed, That the *Holy Scriptures* are of divine Inspiration and Authority; that they are the perfect, sufficient, standing RULE of all that Faith and Practice which is necessary to recommend us to the divine Acceptance.

Thus far you will allow that both sides are agreed. They are agreed as to the RULE and the OBJECT of Worship; it is one and the same which both accept of, acknowledge, and submit to.

And here, Sir, I think I shall not go much out of my way, if I should take notice of that part of your Letter where you insinuate, that the OBJECT of Worship is not the same, but divers: This, Sir, I thought was

was pushing the Matter beyond all reasonable Bounds. Give me leave, Sir, to appeal to your own more deliberate Thoughts.

Will not the *Arians* and *Unitarians* give their ready assent to all those intelligible *Descriptions* of the *Deity*, which are suitable to our natural Apprehensions of him? And will they not as readily assent to all those express *Descriptions* we find in his Word?

I know you will urge, that the *Trinitarians* do worship the *second* and *third Persons*, i. e. *Son* and *Spirit*, which cannot be said of the *Arians* or *Unitarians*. I answer, That this does by no means infer a different **OBJECT** of Worship, unless you will say, that there be three **OBJECTS** of Worship, and that the *second* and *third* are distinct **OBJECTS** of Worship from the *first Person*.

It is acknowledg'd, that the *Arians* or *Unitarians* do not consider **GOD** under the Notion of a *Son*; they do not distinguish *Him* into *First*, *Second*, or *Third*. But let me put one serious Question to you; Do not they worship that very **GOD** we do, that most high **GOD**, that eternal *Being*, that infinite *Spirit*, who made the *World*, who redeemed it, and will judge it by his *Son Jesus Christ*? Do not they worship that individual all-perfect *Being*, which we distinguish into *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Ghost*?

It

It cannot enter into my Imagination, that the applying or not applying these Terms, *Names, Appellations, or Modes of Expression* to the *Deity*, does in the least infer a different OBJECT of Worship: This way of Reasoning, I must confess, is too fine for my Understanding to take in. GOD told *Moses*, that *By his name Jehovah he was not known to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*. Now would it not be a strange Inference from hence, That the OBJECT of Worship among these Patriarchs was not the same with that of the *Israelites* in the time of *Moses*?

I believe that most Christians upon due Examination will find, that in their *Acts of Devotion*, their Minds are not so intent upon the divine Personality, as upon the intelligible Perfections, i. e. That GOD is our Almighty, All-wise, and All-good Creator, Preserver, Governor, Judge, and Benefactor. In *Him*, as thus consider'd, does our Worship centre and fix itself, exclusive of all other *Beings* whatever. This I take to be the Ground, the Foundation, and Reason of that Worship and supreme Homage which is paid unto *Him* by any of the Creatures.

Sir, I have been something the larger upon this last Head, I mean those things wherein both Parties are agreed, because I think it one of the best steps that can be taken towards a *Reconciliation*. It is an Unhappiness, that

that all Parties are too apt to keep their Eye so fix'd and steddy upon the Points in Difference, as to forget those Things wherein there is a profess'd Agreement ; whereas would they but single out those several *Particulars* wherein they are agreed, I am perswaded they would find them to be so many, and so considerable, as to convince them, that each others CHRISTIANITY is much nearer of kin than hitherto they imagin'd.

As for that Danger to the *Truth*, and that enormous mixture of *Tares* and *Wheat*, you seem in the close of your Letter to be so much afraid of, I verily think it much more tolerable than those Inconveniencies the contrary method will unavoidably occasion. Do what we can, a *Mixture* there will be. Not the *Fan* of the *Inquisition* it self will be able thorowly to purge the *Floor*.

But pray, Sir, what absolute Necessity is there of being so exceeding nice in this *Cafe*? What great Injury will it be to the *Church*, what Prejudice to the *Truth*, altho we do not exclude every honest Man who may differ from us in these more difficult Points? Will not *Truth* have as much fair play as ever, by keeping up a Christian Correspondence with each other? Will not these *Mistakes* we are thus terribly alarm'd at, be as catching out of the *Church* as in it?

Has

Has any thing been more common than for *Church-Weeders* to thrust out much better than they take in? What an excellent Bargain does the poor *Church* make of it by these *Acts of Faith*, while it parts with a sincere tho' mistaken Christian, and at the same time takes in and cherishes that which proves its Dishonour and Reproach !

What means this strange, this busy Officibusness? Would we leave nothing for the Angels to do at the great Day, not so much as to bundle up and cast into the Fire! But surely those glorious Labourers in the divine Harvest will make much better Work of it, or it will go very hard with many an honest Man.

To conclude, Is it not, Sir, a thousand pities that in Debates of a *religious* Nature, where one would least of all expect it, there should be such a general Disposition to widen and aggravate, rather than to contract and heal. From what Principle it proceeds I shall not determine: Of this we may be certain, that *Charity* hath had very little to do in the matter; for had our Minds been more season'd with that divine Grace, our *religious Differences* had long ago been brought into a much narrower compass. I readily grant, that there is a false *Charity*, as well as a false *Hope* or *Faith*; such I mean, which by encouraging a wicked Life and

Temper, flies in the Face of God's Authority, and leads on to certain Ruin ; but what relation has this to the case in hand, wherein it is very possible for many an honest good Christian to differ from his Neighbours.

Some indeed have taken upon them to call in question the Sincerity of the *Arians* or *Unitarians*, and are very positive that they are under a divine Dereliction. But surely this requires a much better Proof than the Confidence of these their Censurers.

Is it not a shocking Consideration, that such *frail sinful Creatures* as we are, should arrogate to our selves the *Prerogative* of searching the Heart, and disposing of the divine Favour according as our darling Notions, partial Affections, and Resentments shall dictate ? Is it not an **HARDY PRESUMPTION** to back our own *Schemes, Inferences, Consequences, and invented Modes of Expression* with the *divine Authority*, and upon every little Opposition to deal out *Curses and Anathema's* by wholesale.

There seems to be **SOMETHING** wonderfully pleasant, natural, and agreeable in **WISHING WELL** to our honest Fellow-Christians, and **HOPING WELL** concerning them. But what imaginable Satisfaction can any **ONE** take in setting them as far out of the reach of Heaven as possible ? Must it not

not be a very awkward and unnatural Pleasure ?

I have so much Charity for the good-natur'd among the *Romanists*, as to think that it is not over-pleasant to them, when ever they are call'd upon to damn all those who are of a different *Faith*. I believe they had rather be excused that harsh OBLIGATION which their ill-natur'd Religion brings them under.

What *Reason*, what *Necessity* is there for us to sit as Judges over our Neighbours in these difficult *Points*? If we apprehend that these their *Mistakes* have a dangerous Tendency, which I think I have prov'd they have not, we may, we ought to inform them better : but to place our selves in the *Judgment-Seat*, and to *pass* the *Sentence*, is none of our Business ; we are no ways qualified for it : we have neither **ABILITY** nor **COMMISSION**, *The Father having committed all Judgment to his Son* ; so that it is hard to say which is the greater, the *Arrogance* or the *Absurdity* of it.

In a word, if there be any thing that can *slay the Enmity, and break down the middle Wall of Partition between us*, it must be that *Spirit of Jesus*, that *Meekness*, that *Humility* and *Charity* so much and so often recommended to us in the **SACRED ORACLES**:

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SIR,

Your most humble Servant,

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